

THE ORIGIN OF "HOOSIER"

What the term "Hoosier" means, and the origin of it, is a question that persists through the years. More than ninety years ago it was discussed in the newspapers, and though the reasonable and probable answer was then indicated, which the Indiana Democrat of October 26, 1833, copied from the Cincinnati Republican, an improbable explanation that chanced to get a footing, is nearly always given in answer. It is that the nickname arose from what was said to be the habit of Indiana pioneers of hailing a cabin with the call "Who's yere?" No authentic pioneer chronicles tell of any such expression. A common hail was, "Hello the house!" in Indiana and elsewhere. More worthy of credence is the notion of James Whitcomb Riley, who maintained that Hoosier evolved from the characteristic scrappiness of the pioneers who in settling their differences bit off each other's features. When, after one of these pleasantries, a belated citizen arrived on the scene and saw a detached ear lying on the ground he naturally asked, "Who's year?" Other stories no more plausible than these derive the word from huzzar, huzza and husher. None of them merit serious consideration. Another story not quite so unlikely is that when the canal around the falls of the Ohio was being dug a contractor by the name of Hoosier employed workmen from the Indiana side of the river. These became known as Hoosier's men, and as there were a great many of them, the use of the name spread until it became associated with Indianians generally.

The discussion of 1833, referred to above as quoted from the Cincinnati Republican, had this to say: "The word Hoosier is indebted for its existence to that once numerous but now extinct class of mortals called the Ohio boatmen. In its original acceptation it was equivalent to 'Ripstaver,' 'Scrouger,' 'Screamer,' 'Bulger,' 'Ring-tail roarer,' and a hundred others. * * * By some caprice the appellation became confined solely to such boatmen as had their homes upon the Indiana shore, and from them it was gradually applied to all the Indianians."

The writer of this perhaps did not know that the word was not confined to the boatmen on the river, but extended southward and was probably common then, as it certainly was later, in the more primitive sections, especially in the mountain districts. Today one may find the word Hoosier there as an expression of contempt for an uncouth and unkempt person. That it made its way northward as part of the southern vocabulary along with the tide of immigration from the south hardly admits of a doubt, and that it attached to the typical early Indianian is an uncomplimentary probability. As the cultural status of the people changed the word gradually lost its earlier implications, but retained its place. The first appearance of the word in print, as far as known, is in the Indiana Palladium for July 30, 1831, which, describing Noah Noble as a horse in the political race, says: "He may be called a 'Hoosher.'"

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TOAD HOP

This is probably a derogatory place name suggesting a small isolated rural community. Toad Hop is in Vigo County, west of Terre Haute.

1. "Bob Stephen's grandmother told me that some people in West Terre Haute set up a mushroom factory over there and that the mushrooms drew all the toads from around here, so they called the place Toad Hop."
2. "Toad Hop located about 1 mile east of West Terre Haute on the west side of Sugar Creek and south side of Highway 40.

It got its name from a family by the name of Harris early in the 1800's...above the hill above Toad Hop to the west and a little south. There were regular floods in the area. Old man Harris would look down from atop the hill where his house was located during the floods and say, "The toads are hopping," referring to the Indians."

3. Also story about a little boy that lived there among early settlers-he was always catching toads, he'd call the toads "Toad Hops" the people just adopted it.
4. One of the early settlers-drunkard-would come stumblin' home at night. Well, one night he fell drunk right down in the middle of the road. Just as he fell down a toad hopped by right in front of him. He got up and says to himself, "Toad Hop, yep, that's where I live, Toad Hop."

Ronald Baker, Indiana State University
Hoosier Folk Legends (Not yet published)

3/81

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TOAD HOP, VILLAGE OF —

22

T. H. TRIBUNE-STAR.

Sunday, Sept. 10, '67



Beatrice Biggs

things I see *Folklore (2nd)* *and hear*

by BEA

There are many kinds of license plates seen on the front of Indiana cars nowadays. Saw one recently with the word Toadhop in big black letters. This reminded me of a short article in the Leaves of Thyme published some seven years ago by the Historical Museum of the Wabash Valley.

The article was on "How the Village of Toad Hop Got Its Name" and was written by Lena Louise Harris.

"One evening in the early 1900's, my father, Gideon A. Harris came in the house and seeing his wife, said: "The toads are hopping out and they will be looking for a place to hop in." Very much surprised his wife asked, "What do you mean?"

He answered, "There is a boat near the Butts' House, taking people out of their homes. You know we always take them in until the backwaters of the Sugar Creek recede, so I was preparing you."

"Well, that is an unusual preparation," said mother.

Little toads, so called hop-toads, belong to the same family as the frogs, and were very abundant on the bottom lands used for farming near where the Darwin Road joined the old National Road, now known as Old Highway Forty. Great numbers of hoptoads were found in the furrows of plowed land and that dug out area where the Old Tile Plant, now the Vigo Mushroom Plant is situated.

The toads noisily chirping, stretch their long (7 inches) slender legs carrying their slender bodies, (about 2 to 3 inches) some distance in the air were quite apparent when they were disturbed.

This knowledge of many toads on farms made the story more amusing to Friday. Mr. Harris' sister's hired man who overheard the story as it was told. The same night he repeated the conversation to the nephews and thus the story reached the neighbors and the people living in the village. Even the families staying with Harris families thought it was an amusing story and shortly began calling themselves Toadhoppers, and gave the nickname which clung to the village of Toadhop.

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This Is How Toad Hop Got

S AUG 7 1982
By DAVE DELANEY
Star State Editor

TOAD HOP — Now the world knows about Toad Hop.

At least those who read the comics do.

This past Thursday, Bob Thaves and Rex May combined their talents to produce yet another installment of "Frank & Ernest", an internationally distributed comic strip from the stable of the Newspaper Enterprise Association.

"Ya, that was me," chuckled May in response to a telephone question. The free-lance writer lives in West Terre Haute and pens maybe half the gag lines to the highly circulated strip.

He's been doing it for about eight years in tandem with artist Bob Thaves, now of Manhattan Beach, California and formerly a postal worker from Terre Haute. Thaves always has his name in the strip in tiny letters.

"You're always angling around for names that are intrinsically funny," explained May. "I thought people might get a kick out of the name Toad Hop."

Certainly some "Frank & Ernest" cartoon readers around the world wondered if there indeed really is a place in Indiana called Toad Hop.

The answer: definitely yes!

Toad Hop is a small place that sits just south of U.S. 40, the National Road, as it leaves West Terre Haute. Sugar Creek meanders along side the northern edge of the community that's home to maybe 150 people.

Of course the first thing people want answered when they hear about Toad Hop is how it got its name.

"I suppose there must've been a lot of toads a hoppin' there," smiled gray-haired Mrs. William Phillips, who runs the Maple Terrace Motel just a piece down U.S. 40 from Toad Hop.

"We get quite a lot of people who

stay with us when they come to visit people in Toad Hop that don't have a lot of room at their place," offered William Phillips, a thin, gray-haired senior citizen. "You should've been here a couple weeks ago when Jake Niccum was here."

Niccum, now of Kentucky and nearly 90, lived for years in the little nearby town with the unusual name. "He could tell you all about that town," he added.

While Niccum was unavailable for an interview, his sister was very much at home in Toad Hop.

Now the wife of Rev. Arthur Lindsey, she's lived in that community nearly all her life.

"That pretty girl running the sweeper there is why I came to Toad Hop," said Rev. Lindsey sitting in his office near the back of his new, one-story home on a hill at the west edge of the tiny town.

The vacuum cleaner soon clicked off and Mrs. Lindsey entered the

office.

"I haven't come very far," said the jovial 70-year-old who last year celebrated her 50th wedding anniversary with her minister husband. "I moved to Toad Hop when I was three months old."

Back then she recalls there were only three houses in the village located about a quarter mile down the hill from their present address. Her family lived in one of them.

Her husband — who arrived in the community in 1929 — explained how the town got its name.

"There's been different theories," he began, "but the old-timers say when the water came over the creek banks in the spring the toads would be jumping all over the place. That's what they say and they ought to know."

That was before the days of the levee in Toad Hop, installed some years ago.

Rev. Lindsey — a short man with gold rimmed glasses — said, "The American Clay Plant is what made Toad Hop." He believes that firm arrived on the scene in the late 1920s — about the time he showed up. It employed about 100 people in its best years, including Lindsey.

The plant went out of business around 1932, recalls the minister, and the Indiana Mushroom Company set up shop in the building. It lasted around a decade before burning down.

"My that was some fire," recalled the reverend. "It went from one end of the building to the other."

For a couple decades, Lindsey ran a grocery store and filling station in Toad Hop. Today, there are just three businesses in the community. Two are taverns: The Toad Hop Inn and

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the Western Star. The other is the Bedino Construction firm.

Offspring of the first families remain. Their names include Certain, Fortune, Crowther, Newell and Anderson.

One thing that's changed in Toad Hop is the re-routing of the National Road. Once U.S. 40 went right

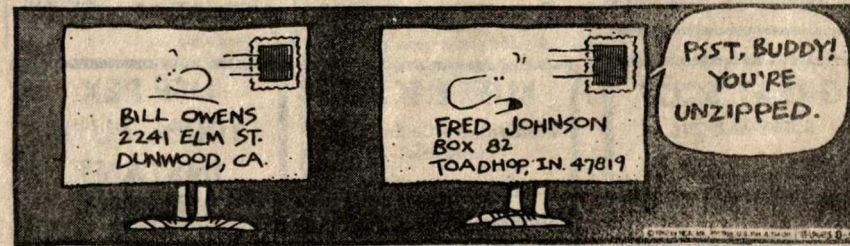
through town. However a 1943 flood took out the bridge. Now all that remains of the concrete structure are a few chunks that poke their ragged edges skyward from where they rest on the bottom of Sugar Creek.

The new U.S. 40 skirts the community, leaving Toad Hop to its 150 inhabitants.



TOAD HOP TIDINGS — The internationally syndicated comic strip "Frank and Earnest" last week published this cartoon about Toad Hop, Indiana of all places. The strip was the work of Bob Thaves and Rex May. Holding the cartoon is long-time Toad Hop resident Rev. Art Lindsey.

(Star Photo: Jim Avelis)



I Hear the Tread of Pioneers

By John G. Biel *Folklore (Ind.)*

Often, we think of the early "Hoosier" as being in the "Daniel Boone class." We never decide, quite definitely, just when he changed but, all of a sudden, he has changed and appears as an artist, writer, professional man, industrialist, politician — and even, statesman. The pictures merge together until we never can quite determine just what a "typical Hoosier" was like at any given period.

There is, however, a good word picture of a "hoosier flatboatman" which has come down to us, today, from some 120 years ago. In 1839, the newspaper, *The New Orleans Picayune*, published an article which described the Hoosier of that period. He was considered a distinctive "type" even then. This article records that "there is a primitive and pristine simplicity of character and independence of mind about a Hoosier that pleases us much. His step is as untrammelled by the artifices of fashion and as free from the constraint of foppery as the mighty rivers of the West are from destruction in their impetuous course to the ocean, or as the path of the buffalo herd over the wild prairies.

Born on the fructuous soil of freedom, and unchecked in his growth by avarice or dissimulation, he rises to manhood with a mind unwarped and a spirit unbent like the trees of the forest around him.

He loves liberty—loves it in his heart's core; he would fight, he would die for it. He cries from his soul 'Long Live Liberty,' because the instinct of his free and unsophisticated nature tells him that it is the inestimable birthright and heritage of man, and he thinks that to live without it is as impossible as to exist without the free air that wanders around his Western home. He may be ignorant of the use of eyeglasses, but is his aim with the rifle less deadly? He may not be able to discuss the merits of the last novel but thinkest thou that he is ignorant of the cardinal principles of liberty? In a word, he may not be a thing with his face hid in a stock, long hair and a shirt collar, but might not more confidence be placed in his brawny arm in time of war than in a whole regiment of such men of doubtful gender?

"We do love to see a Hoosier

roll along the levee with the proceeds of the cargo of his flatboat in his pocket. It is the wages of industry, and no lordly ecclesiastic or titled layman dares claim a cent of it. See with what pity he regards those who are confined to the unchanging monotony of a city life, and observe how he despises the uniformity of dress. He has just donned a new blue dress coat with silk linings and flowered gilt buttons. His new trousers look rather short for the present fashion but this is easily accounted for—they were of stocking fit, or French cut, at the instep, and thinking they pressed rather close, he has cut off some six inches of their fair proportions. He glories in still sporting the same unpolished big boots and the woolen, round-topped, wide-brimmed hat in which he set out from home. The Hoosier says, or seems to say—'A life in the woods for me,' and his happy and independent life attests the wisdom of his choice."

One writer in commenting on this article said that "Times have changed and the Hoosier has changed with them. He is at home now in all the cities from Chicago to Paris, and if one undertakes to discuss the merits of the latest novel with him, one is likely to find that the Hoosier wrote it." That is all true, but we only hope that he never

changes so much so that he forgets that freedom still "is inestimable birthright and heritage of man" and that he always keeps uppermost in his mind that "to live without it is as impossible as to exist without the free air that wanders around his Western home." Sometimes, in this present, we forget the long, hard—and sometimes bloody—struggles of the past which gave us the freedom we enjoy. If we are still to have those freedoms in the future, we can not take them for granted but we must protect them—consciously and actively.

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